

FOREWORD

Pham Hoai Thanh stands out as one of the photographers most dedicated to vulnerable communities in Vietnam. In the hopes of contributing to the fight against drugs, he spent a year working with 50 people who have overcome or still use illegal substances – and the result is the first photo project about the private lives of drug users.

In their own words, the subjects tell us how they first became involved with drugs, about their battles against the long-lasting effects of addiction, and – most of all – their desire to make a life as productive members of their families and communities. Their stories celebrate the support they have received from loved ones and groups throughout civil society, via behavior-change communication outreach, counseling, needle and syringe exchanges, methadone maintenance therapy, and the invaluable help from others in the community of people who use drugs.

Thanh began working with vulnerable communities quite by chance, when the Institute for Social Development Studies, a Vietnamese non-governmental organization, hired him as a photographer and designer to help create communication materials for HIV prevention in the early 2000s. Thanh's conversations with HIV-positive people transformed his views on the disease, and he became haunted by the heavy stigma they endured. He set aside his business and travelled throughout Vietnam to meet people living with HIV, journeys that resulted in two photo exhibitions sharing their stories: "Life Going on I & II." His photos have helped reduce discrimination and restore hope for many people who live with the virus.

We hope that "Face-to-Face with Drugs" will help bring down the barriers that divide people who use drugs from their communities, allowing our understanding, empathy and love to enter the battle against drugs, as well as our support for the people who struggle against addiction.

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